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ABSTRACT

Approximately 600 telephone interviews were conducted in a study that investigated attitudes toward television and radio programs and program preferences of different audience groups. Findings indicated that younger subjects tended to like rock music and were more concerned with international news than were older subjects. Little difference was found between males and females in general news consumption, but males reported listening to business or agriculture news more than females. Females rated soap operas more highly than did males, with 40% of the males giving such shows the lowest possible rating. Females also were more negative in their general assessment of television programing than were males. Less educated subjects reported watching more television and had more positive attitudes toward game shows and action/adventure shows than did more educated subjects. They also reported less liking for folk music, classical music, and international news, and more liking for country music than other groups. College graduates tended to like folk music more than did other groups, while the effect for classical music seemed to be due largely to very positive attitudes of postgraduate students. (FL)

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AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF MEDIA PROGRAM PREFERENCES AND TASTES

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Since the early days of empirical research in media studies, the focus on inter-relationships between audience characteristics and media preferences has been an important one. Much of this research has been designed to document the amount of consumption of various media sources by differing groups of persons and the functions performed by these differing media channels (Schramm and Porter, 1982). This past research has demonstrated a number of differences in programming tastes of different groups. For example, males watch sports programs more than females do (Ganz, 1981), more educated viewers have lower general attitudes toward television than less-educated viewers (although they watch as much as each other), older and more educated viewers watch more news and public affairs programs on television (Steiner, 1963), and less-educated persons prefer more action-oriented programs (Steiner,1963).

The classic studies represented by Lazarsfeld's The People Look at Radio, Steiner's The People Look at Television, and Bower's Television and the Public (as well as the research of others)suggest that differences in matters of programming taste tend to be small ones. In their overview of this empirical research and other polling data (such as provided by Nielsen),Schramm and Porter (1982) indicate that few substantial differences exist in matters of taste. They write: "women by a slight margin are the heaviest viewers, but the audience composition from one category to another are remarkably alike. Such apparent lack of discrimination may say something very

significant about the seriousness and intensity with which the average viewer watches; the only important decision, perhaps, is whether or not to turn the set on." (Schramm and Porter, p.143). Despite this conclusion, Schramm and Porter suggest that the last word on the matter of audience preferences has not yet been written. The authors note "Nevertheless, changing tastes are worthy of much more study than they have received." We concur with this observation.

For one thing, the social milieu of American culture and the media technologies within this milieu have changed substantially in only the past few years. The video cassette recorder has made it possible for audiences to establish more direct control over their programming alternatives -- an afternoon soap opera can be watched in the evening, a Wednesday movie can be seen on Friday, etc (Levy, 1983). The blooming of cable television has increased the number of potentially available program options. The women's movement, the concurrent alternatives in the composition of the work force, and the structure of family life may have had an impact on the patterns and preferences of broadcast reception. The shift to a service-oriented American economy, the increasing internationalism of our economic and cultural lives, the technological revolution, and the advent of a new information age, may also have had an influence. Such changes in society call for continued appraisal of the audiences of media programming.

Furthermore, the classic studies by Steiner and Bowers, as well as Nielsen reports, have utilized relatively limited

statistical analysis of results, relying primarily on percentages and analysis of cross-tabulated data. While their results were certainly illuminating, there is room for further and more precise examination, using the now more-prevalent tools of multivariate analysis. Moreover, the Steiner and Bower studies both attempted very broad overviews of a wide range of attitudes about television; yet each provided little simultaneous investigation of the sample's attitudes toward radio programming.

Our study investigated a focused set of attitudes toward television and radio program preferences of different audience groups. Because Schramm and Porter noted differences in age, sex and education with regard to program tastes, we included these variables in our study, along with marital status, the number of adults in household, and number of members in household. The latter three demographic variables were considered as potentially important, given changes in the structure of family life which we expected would influence programming preferences.

In order to obtain a wide distribution of attitudes toward programming, we attempted to include all of the major categories of radio and television programs in our survey of subject attitudes: radio music, radio sports, local radio news, radio weather radio national news, radio business/agriculture news, radio international news, radio talk shows, radio drama, TV sports, TV documentary, TV sitcoms, TV movies, TV music, TV soap opera, TV talk shows, TV game shows and TV

action-adventure shows. In addition, because music represents such a large component of radio programming, we included questions about ten of the most prevalent forms of music formats: classical, country, jazz, rock, punk rock, big band, soul, folk, beautiful music, and opera.

Finally, we asked subjects several questions about overall attitudes toward TV programming and general consumption of various types of media -- questions which were important features of the earlier classic studies developed by Steiner and Bower. Our research questions were as follows:

RQ1: Is there a substantial and significant relationship between age and broadcast programming preferences which is different from results of earlier research?

RQ2: Is there a substantial and significant relationship between sex and broadcast programming preferences?

RQ3: Is there a substantial and signfiicant relationship between education and broadcast programming preferences?

RQ4: Are there significant relationships between family and household structure and broadcast programming preferences?

METHODOLOGY

Subjects were randomly chosen from the telephone directory of a midwestern community (pop. aprox 30-50,000). The community is greatly influenced by the presence of a large university, and within 65 miles of a metropolitan area.

Interviews were conducted by undergraduate communication majors taking a course in survey research methods. Telephone interviewing was utilized to obtain a large sample in a short time period. Calls were made in morning, afternoon, and evening time blocks assigned on a random basis. If a potential subject could not be reached in the originally-selected time slot, a new time was provided. Potential respondents who could not be reached after several calls were dropped from the survey and replaced by new numbers, also selected randomly. Student interviewers included subject phone numbers on the survey forms and the results were spot-checked by subsequent calling of several respondents from each interviewer's list.[1] The telephone interviewer procedure produced 607 usable interviews. The sample included more females than males (56.5%/43.5%), about an equal ratio of single (45.1%) and married (47.4%) persons, and a higher portion of educated persons than the general public (less than high school 4.3%; some high school 8.1%; high school graduates 19.8%; some college 39%; college graduate 19.1% and post-graduate 9.7%). About forty per cent were between 19 and 25 years of age. Twenty five percent were between 26 and 49, while 22% were fifty and over, 4% were under 18.

Our sample included more single persons proportionately thab the general population, and was slightly more educated than the general public. The median income of persons in the study area ($17,000) is commensurate with median income for the U.S. as a whole, $16,500. Household size (2.5)

is similar to the U.S. (2.78). The population of the sample-community (40,000) reflects U.S. medium size communities (30% of the U.S. population live in towns of 10,000-50,000 persons). In addition, the population provides a good cross-section of rural, urban, suburban and university influences: ninety-two percent of the sampling population is caucasian, with only small numbers of blacks, Hispanic and oriental. Ethnic heritage of persons in the sample-county is typical of many midwestern areas: influences of English, Scandinavian, German, Polish and Italian immigrants are evident in the early settlement of the area.

A canonical correlation analysis was conducted to examine the interrelations of our two theoretically-derived sets of variables: subject background and program preferences. This multivariate procedure attempts to uncover the strongest relationships between the two sets. In addition, post hoc exploration of results was undertaken to examine frequency distributions and univariate correlations. The SPSS statistical package was used for all analyses.

RESULTS

The results of the canonical correlation analysis are summarized in Table 1. Three significant canonical variates were uncovered:

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INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

- -

Table 2 reveals coefficients of the canonical variables for the "respondents background characteristics" for each of the three significant canonical variates, while Table 3 reveals coefficients of the canonical variables for "media style and preferences."

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INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

- -

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

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Inspection of the correlation coefficients in Tables 2 and 3 indicates that age (.93) is the main determinant of background characteristics for the first significant correlation, while attitude toward rock music (-.45) and international news (-.26) loaded highly on the "media style and preferences" set of variables for the analysis. Young respondents tended to like rock music and were more concerned internationally than older respondents were.

The main background determinant for the second canonical variate was sex (.97) while the main preference determinants were attitude toward TV programming (-.47), attitude toward soap operas (.27), and attitude toward business/agriculture news (-.23). It seems that males in our survey watched more

bus/agri-news on TV than females, while females preferred soap operas more than males. More dramatically, females were more negative in their assessment of TV programming than were males (-.47).

The main background variable concerning the third canonical variate was educational level (-.97). Several "preference" variables loaded highly on this canonical variate. Positive loadings were attained for Amount of TV Watched (.36), Liking Toward Country Music (.30), Liking of Action-Adventure Programs on TV (.25), and Liking of Game Shows (.21). Less educated respondents had more favorable attitudes toward such programs and watched more TV than more educated viewers. Loading on the negative side of the spectrum were Attitude Toward Folk Music (-23), International News (-19), and Classical Music (-.18). Educated respondents tended to like these type programs more than their less educated counterparts.

DISCUSSION

Some of the findings uncovered in this research were far from surprising. Others helped substantiate past research work. Some findings, however, added new and somewhat surprising information to our body of knowledge about broadcast media preferences of American consumers.

Our first research question concerned relationships between age and program preferences. The finding that younger

subjects tended to like rock music more than older subjects was not shocking, but the greater emphasis of younger subjects on international news merits explanation. Past research, in study after study, has shown that older subjects in general express more positive attitudes toward news and public information programs than younger subjects (see Becker, 1983). Steiner, for example, found a direct positive relationship between age and news consumption. Why should our results be different here? One influence, perhaps, is that we included few subjects in our sample who were under eighteen, so our study was limited primarily to adults. Even so, the past research would indicate more news involvement by older subjects -- Steiner found that subjects over 55 had the most interest in news programs. Analysis of cross tabulations in our data showed a quite different effect. Thoseover 65 were negative toward international news, while our younger college-age group had the most positive attitude toward that program type. The best explanation here is the social change occuring in American society which we referred to in the introduction. As the American media become more internationally-oriented, and as the modern world becomes a more "global village" (as McLuhan prophesized), younger people may be becoming more internationally inclined. International travel,career opportunities abroad, and more international contact in general, surely have influenced attitudes. Some older viewers seem less oriented to international style of information acquisition. Thus, subject attitudes toward international news are correlated

negatively with age, while no such relationship in our study was uncovered for national or local news. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that all groups in our study reported positive attitudes toward international news -- younger subjects were just more positive than older subjects.

The effects uncovered for sex and programming preferences were interesting in light of sex role shifting in American culture, and other effects of the "women's movement." Males continue to be more business-oriented in their approach to the media. While our study found little difference between males and females in general news consumption, males reported listening to business/agriculture news far more than females. This distinction in preferences by gender was pronounced in our study, although most studies of broadcast media do not explore this kind of news programming. Nevertheless, some people may be surprised that twenty-five percent of the females did report listening to business/agriculture news. If we believe that information is important in determining career awareness or advancement opportunities, and that information about the business world is important in decision-making, the results here could have implications for economic functioning of American business in general, and women's potential for advancement in the world of business in particular.

In addition to this difference in listening to bus/agri-news, we found a strong relationship between gender and attitudes toward television soap operas. Females rated TV Soap Operas

much more favorably than males rated them. This might suggest that females are more "home and family" oriented than males in their program preferences, but it is worth noting that the sex effect for soap operas was largely due to males distaste for "soaps" rather than femaleliking of them. Forty percent of the males gave them the lowest possible rating, and over seventy percent reported disliking them. Female attitudes, on the other hand, were widely-dispersed and less than half of the females (45%) said they liked watching soap operas.

The most interesting finding concerning sex differences, however, was the result which indicated that females were more negative in their general assessment of TV programming than males were. Fifty percent of females thought TV programming was getting worse, while forty percent of males held this attitude. By contrast, only twenty-five percent of females thought TV was improving, while thirty-five percent of the males held this view. The Roper report (1983) found generally positive attitudes toward television in the American viewing public.

Why should women be more critical of TV programming than males are? One likely explanation is that women are more family-oriented and concerned with the influence of TV on children more than men are. Earlier studies (eg. Steiner, 1960; Bower, 1972) provide evidence to doubt this, however, in showing that parents of both sexes tend to evaluate television more positively than do non-parents (in terms of its

value to children). A more plausible explanation may be that increased awareness of problems brought to light by the women's movement, such as sex-role stereotyping in the media, may make women more critical. Also, increased sex and violence in television programming, may be more distasteful to some women. These hypotheses should be explored in further research.

Our third research question pertained to the influences of education and audience preferences. Less educated viewers reported watching more television, and they had more positive attitudes toward game shows and action-adventure programs than more educated viewers. They also reported less liking for folk music, classical music, and international news, more liking for country music. College graduates tended to like folk music more than did other groups, while the effect for classical music seemed to be due largely to very positive attitudes of post-graduates. This may reflect their orientation toward higher and more sophisticated elements of culture. Only one person of 160 subjects in post-graduate and college graduate group reported liking game shows at the "very high" level. This suggests that perhaps current game shows or action-adventure programs may not be as challenging for the educated viewers as for less educated. Perhaps the focus of game shows on more trivia-type material is also seen as less useful for more educated viewers. In any case, and despite these differences, game shows were generally not not very popular with our sample: only about one-fifth of

subjects reported liking game shows, while sixty-three percent held negative attitudes toward these programs. These results, generally, are consistent with Steiner's work which showed that liking for action/adventure programs and, in general, liking for light entertainment, decreased with education. Steiner also found decreased liking for quiz shows with education, a finding consistent with our own. Steiner, however, classified quiz shows as "information-public affairs" which we think is incorrect. Quiz shows, in Steiner's data, followed the same pattern of results as other categories of light entertainment, and seems more appropriately placed in that category.

CONCLUSION

The role of broadcast media in our lives cannot be fully assessed without basic research concerning the preferences of audience members. Often areas of media research, like music or quiz shows, get neglected by scholars because such areas are perceived less important or of less academic value than news programs or films. Such assumptions "fly in the face" of the fact that music dominates radio programming and is becoming a more important force in television. Quiz shows, soap operas, and other "light entertainment" programs occupy a substantial segment of broadcast programming. Moreover, the concerns and interests of audiences, and the determinants of programming tastes can have wide practical,as well as, theoretical implications. For example, if women's attitudes toward television programs are changing, as the research

suggests, it may be possible to develop more effective formats to meet the needs of women. If quiz shows are not challenging for educated views now, it may be lucrative for a network to attempt a more challenging or exciting format for this type viewer. Our research leads us to reject notions that few differences exist in the attitudes of different types of audience members toward differing types of programming. We also believe that many of the differences uncovered are important ones. The low ratings by women of their listening to business news may be an ominous sign for the advancement of females in business, and may be an ominous sign for the improvement of economic knowledge. The comparatively higher attitudes toward soap operas by females has implications for our understanding of sex role changes in American society. The increased acceptability of international news among younger members of our sample may be a signal of changing social trends in our continually evolving culture. These issues demand future and further investigation if our understanding of mediated communication in a complex society is to march forward with the cultural changes affecting all of us.

END NOTES

[1]Approximately 300 spot checks were made out of an original sample size of 770 interviews. Several of the undergraduate student interviews were rejected as a result of these calls. If there was any doubt as to authenticity of interviews, the entire set produced by the interviewer was disregarded. Though this procedure was conservative, and reduced the overall sample size, we concluded that it was the best procedure in the interest of obtaining a valid sample.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 1

CANONICAL CORRELATION FOR SUBJECT BACKGROUND VS. MEDIA STYLE AND PREFERENCES

Number	Eigenvalue	Canonical Correlation	Wilks Lamda	Chi Square	DF	Significance
1	.62	.78	.14	1048.57	234	.000
2	.36	.60	.36	537.56	190	.000
3	.27	.52	.58	295.53	148	.000
4	.09	.31	.79	125.05	108	.125
5	.09	.29	.87	72.76	70	.387
6	.05	.21	.95	25.11	34	.866

TABLE 2

COEFFICIENTS FOR CANONICAL VARIABLES
FOR FIRST SET: SUBJECT BACKGROUND

	Canvar 1	Canvar 2	Canvar 3
Subject Age	0.93	-0.16	-0.23
Subject Sex	0.36	0.97	-0.11
Members in House	0.10	-0.27	0.15
Adults in House	-0.13	0.23	-0.04
Subject Schooling	-0.04	-0.11	-0.97
Marital Status	0.12	0.07	0.16

TABLE 3
COEFFICIENTS FOR CANONICAL
VARIABLES FOR THE SECOND SET

	CANVAR 1	CANVAR 2	CANVAR 3
Amount of Radio	-0.01	-0.07	0.02
Amount of TV	0.18	-0.05	0.36
No. of Newspapers	0.04	-0.01	-0.06
No. of Magazines	-0.01	-0.08	-0.11
Am't.of Radio;morning	0.02	0.15	0.04
Am't.of Radio;eve.	-0.01	-0.08	-0.05
Am't.of Radio;aft.	-0.02	0.12	-0.11
Partic. Stations("flip")	-0.03	-0.08	0.05
Classic Music	0.03	0.16	-0.18
Country Music	0.01	0.04	0.30
Jazz	-0.11	0.05	-0.12
Rock	-0.45	0.11	0.14
Punk	-0.08	0.03	0.06
Big Band	0.02	-0.04	0.10
Soul	-0.06	-0.01	0.06
Folk	0.02	-0.01	-0.23
Beautiful	0.14	0.10	-0.01
Opera	0.16	-0.01	-0.09
No. of Kinds Music	0.01	0.04	0.04
Attitude:To Radio Music	-0.08	-0.12	-0.06
Radio Sports	-0.01	-0.17	0.05
Radio Local News	0.06	0.00	0.15
Radio Weather	0.05	0.13	-0.04
Radio Nat'l. News	0.14	0.03	-0.01
Radio Business & Agri.	0.01	-0.23	-0.06
Radio Int'l. News	-0.26	0.05	-0.19
Radio Talk Shows	0.14	0.04	0.04
Radio Drama	-0.00	0.12	-0.05
Attitude: TV Programs	-0.04	0.12	-0.14
TV Sports	-0.03	-0.47	0.03
TV Documentary	0.11	-0.07	-0.14
TV SitCom	-0.03	0.20	-0.03
TV Movies	-0.11	-0.01	-0.15
TV Music	-0.02	0.14	0.09
TV Soaps	-0.04	0.27	-0.05
TV Talk Shows	-0.04	0.13	-0.02
TV Game Shows	0.09	0.07	0.21
TV Action-Adventure	-0.09	-0.17	0.25
Go to Movies	-0.19	-0.01	0.06